

Romans 12:9-21 (NRSV) ~ *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(The Message) ~ Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they are happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

Come to the Table

If you have the opportunity to watch many talk shows, or even cooking shows, on day-time television these days, you know that there are often fascinating guests featured. After hearing each guest's own story of life, it seems that a common question asked at the close of the interview is: "If you could have a meal and a conversation with any person, living or not, who would that be, and why?" The responses of these

celebrities, sports heroes, and other famous folks, cover a wide range of persons: Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, Helen Keller, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Chief Seattle, Malala Yousafzai, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter, Susan B. Anthony, the Dalai Lama, one's parent, or grandparent, a teacher, or mentor....just to name a few. Why? Because these people are, or have been, inspirational role models for others, and perhaps for us, too.

A couple of weeks ago I turned on the television while putting clean sheets on the bed and what came on? The View! It was nearly the end of the show, so I just left it on for company in the room, when Whoopi Goldberg asked a guest ~ someone unknown to me ~ "If you could have a meal and a conversation with any person, living or not, who would that be, and why?" The response that came: "Jesus!" "Jesus!" he said, "because I would like to listen to what Jesus would teach us for life today, and ask if I am anywhere close to getting it right." Jesus!

Imagine, sitting at a dinner table with Jesus! Imagine having a conversation with Jesus, in the midst of a group of others who are wrestling with life in the 21st Century, and eager to hear Jesus' words of instruction, hope, love, peace, grace, and joy! Imagine! Actually, it is difficult for many of us to even imagine that kind of an encounter with Jesus. For one thing, many feel unworthy of taking up Jesus' time and attention. And imagining this scene is also difficult because sitting around a table as family to share our journeys of joy, challenge, anguish, struggle, and celebration, has become increasingly rare in our culture. We are more likely to eat meals alone, at a desk, in front of a television, at different times from other family members, co-workers, or friends. And by doing so, we miss out on the daily interaction that binds us in relationships shaped around shared conversations, experiences, supporting one another in facing challenges, and showing interest in one another's lives.

Today, and every day, Jesus invites us to his table. This is the table where Jesus reminds us that God created **each of us** to be inspirational role models, too. And Jesus assures us that mistakes, sins, mis-steps, back-sliding, fumbles, and failures are all in the past, because all is forgiven – right here, right now. With Jesus, we are given a clean slate, and the opportunity to start again to choose God's way of living and relating to one another.

Paul reminds us in this section of the letter to Romans about some of those choices and how to care for ourselves and our relationships. These teachings are based on what he has learned about **the** life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus. These teachings are imparted to us, as if we were sitting together at a table where the feast is the nourishment of body and soul for faith-filled living!

Come to the Table

Romans 12:9-21

Rev. Beckie Sweet

Eugene's Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message* makes Paul's teachings easy to understand and remember. But any biblical translation of this passage is a wonderful guide for life. The choices are for good or for evil. 'For building up relationships, or tearing them apart. 'For living in humility and offering hospitality with compassion, or shutting others out of our lives by ignoring their needs. 'For living a life filled and inspired by love, or letting evil and hatred destroy us.

Please do not dismiss that you are called to be an inspirational role model for the way of Christ. Others are watching to determine if we, who profess to be Christians, practice what we preach. Yes, we all fall short. So Jesus invites us to Come to the Table, to work it out here with the Giver of Grace...with conversation where it is safe to make a confession, with freely offered forgiveness that heals the soul, and with the conviction that for Jesus we can and will try again.

We hear Jesus calling us by name to Come to the Table. (*List names*) But there are those who have yet to hear Jesus' call. Many of us listed on a card about a month ago, the names of persons we would like to see in the pews beside us. All of us can think of individuals, and perhaps whole families, who need to know Jesus and be a part of a family of faith. It is time now to call them to the table of Jesus, our Savior. It is time now to take the risk and to be courageously bold for Jesus. May Jesus' call be heard through our voices, in tones that are: gentle, yet urgent; humble, yet convicted; hospitable and non-judgmental; genuinely loving and hope-filled. Jesus invites us all to Come to the Table of love, peace, grace, and joy. Amen.